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23 SKIDOO



23 Skidoo

Behind a relatively obscure series of releases on the now-defunct Fetish Records label and the recently-prosperous Illuminated Records (which also releases Dornannu, Portion Control, and 400 Blows) is the band 23 Skidoo. All of the releases from this band seem to form an interesting whole, from their earliest EP's "Last Words" and "Tearing Up the Plans" to the new illuminated LP *Urban Gamelan*.

This unity of direction holds up in spite of a large degree of experimentation. They have worked with different musical styles, from the "dark" funk of *Seven Songs* to the reggae rhythms of *Urban Gamelan*, to the actual gamelan music itself, and to the similarity of attitude; an approach to music and what can be discovered through it. Needless to say, 23 Skidoo is not a conventional rock band. *Urban Gamelan* contains two songs ("Fuck You G!" and "Fire") which might appeal to a wider audience, but for the most part it is a complex overlay of congas, cylinders, metal plates, bass, and drums.

The band is still more or less the same as it was at its inception, with three out of the original five musicians still present: JCM Turbull, Fritz Haaman, and Alex Turnbull operating under the name of A. Lim; and then there is Mr. Sketch (who was also present on the mini-LP *Seven Songs*) and Schizo, who does vocals on "Fire." The sound is distinctively 23 Skidoo, encompassing an entire range of styles which they have tried over the years. "Fuck You G!" has the funky, psychedellic sound of the 1983 "Coup" single from which it was lifted; "Fire" is out-and-out

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reggae; and the rest of the album includes the gamelan music from which the title springs. In this last mode, the record best displays the sparseness and minimalism of some of their earlier EP's.

This music is experimental in the sense that there is an attempt to create ritual music, or music to accompany a discovery. That moment of discovery through music seems to speak best for music's original function—promoting and accompanying the psychic unravelling. The musics employed by religious and occult groups in their services certainly have this function. 23 Skidoo's music is in fact done for a more functional purpose than mere entertainment; this also holds true for the "Psychic TV Themes" of that group's 1982 *Force the Hand of Chance*. An offbeat but central figure in the English brand of magic(k)al music performed and recorded by 23 Skidoo, Psychic TV, Coil, and particularly Nurse With Wound and Current 93—the last three all being on the English/Belgian Laylah label) is David Tibet. According to the members of these groups, and to PTV's information outlet Nanavesh, Tibet ran or runs an odd Tibetan art shop in England, in which all sorts of musical and ritual objects from that Asian country could be acquired. These instruments, ranging from temple bells to human thigh bones that are played like flutes, have shaped the ideas as well as the music of these bands. With their distinct and primitive Asian sound coupled with the use of modern technology (synthesizers, guitars, basses, and electronic distortion effects), a balance is created between the modern sensibilities of the rock music generations and the calling of a more ancient and instinctive musical need: the definition and exploration of the occult consciousness through music.

David Tibet was present on 23 Skidoo's *The Culling is Coming* of 1982 on a side-length piece entitled "A Summer Rite—11 AM 17.7.82." The various sections of the "Rite" follow an odd variant of the ritual scenario, first "Banishing" and then "Invocation," as if the evil spirits of musical expectation must be overcome before powerful forces can work. The last section, "Healing (For the Strong)," no doubt washes over "The Weak."

When occult leader Aleister Crowley (late of The Golden Dawn society) heard that some beginners had violated the magical circle and had not been struck by lightning, he suggested that it was because the spirits were too busy to bother with such dunderheads. The adaptation of a new attitude towards music, and ultimately to a new lifestyle and way of thinking, leads to an altered consciousness. The "Summer Rite" of 23 Skidoo is an effective tool for the "Banishing" of the old demons and the "Invoking" of the new, the more powerful; the strong as opposed to the weak.

The presence of "D. Tibet 93" in any project, on any album, be it by 23 Skidoo or Current 93, is a clear indicator of at least one intention: the desire to push music to a more highly sensitive level of communication. Occult communication, if you will; direct knowledge, or *gnosis*, without intermediary. Tibet's controversial thigh bones (which, by the way, have been confiscated by the British Government and declared illegal) were believed to put the player and listener into contact with the essence of the deceased human who contributed the bone (These bones can be heard on *Force the Hand of Chance*).

There is nothing new about what 23 Skidoo is doing, or for that matter what PTV and Current 93 are doing for that matter—not musically. What is so significant is that these people are reaching and touching an audience previously closed off to occult musical modes. While still confined to the narrow range of the rock category (these are still all "bands" with "names" who have "records available"), cruelly exposed to the still narrower attitudes of the traditional rock press, and forced to play clubs like New York's Danceteria when appearing overseas, these groups and their efforts are slowly making important headway.

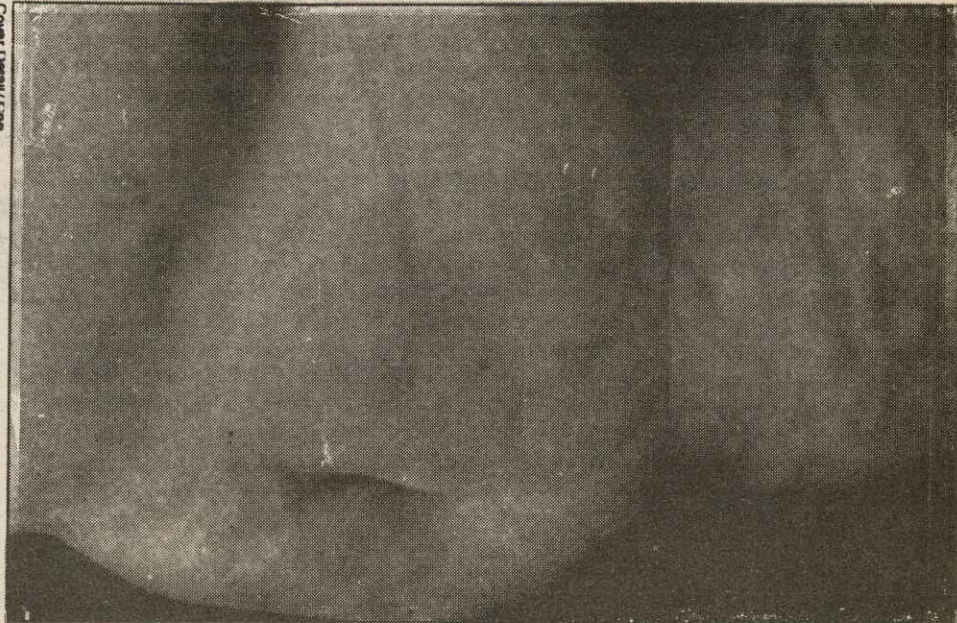
Urban Gamelan is a fine indication that experiments like these in music can manage to stay above water in a very murky, misunderstood, and misdirected rock scene. The combined forces of 23 Skidoo, Psychic TV, Current 93, and the others have the capacity to slowly but successfully eat their own niche into that same industry which sells out tens of thousands of seats at The Meadows for pop-rock groups. The difference is, we probably won't see David Tibet playing on a human thigh bone in a big rock stadium.

The undermining of a grossly exaggerated system has to be accomplished through what guitarist Robert Fripp had called "Small, mobile, intelligent units"—the kind that his own band has unfortunately failed to become. While rock corporations continue to count their mounting profits, we can breathe more easily in that there are those small units out there doing what they want to do, without the unyielding spectre of compromise always at their backs and necks. They are working in the way that they want to, and doing it effectively.

While 23 Skidoo is presently preparing its new single for Illuminated, "Ouzi," and while that record label has rereleased the important *Seven Songs* of 1981, Current 93 has issued a second LP, *Dogs Blood Rising*, and Psychic TV has issued both a live LP and the picture-disc album *A Pagan Day*. The new works by these parties shall be studied in depth, in upcoming issues of A/a.

—Richard Behrens with CH

SWANS



Cover Detail/Cop

Cop is the only record that has ever existed. Michael Gira is the only man in the entire world. The Swans are the only band in the universe. There is no other sonic experience of such incredible magnitude and power to be found anywhere. That is an absolute fact. Cop is total human withdrawal.

When The Swans issued *Filth* in 1983, on Glenn Branca's Neutral label, it blew heavy metal away. It devoured hardcore, and still does. Now Cop devours *Filth*. There is no way to listen to its tracks "Half Life," "Clay Man," and "Your Property" without slowly peeling to shreds. Gira is a genius. The Swans get you exactly into his state of mind—and then they leave you there.

This last claim at least can be substantiated; *Filth* was a document of extreme rhythm and power. Its emotional punch was however more abstractly directed than is that of Cop. As a still-available LP, one can clearly see *Filth* as a crystallization of style. Every sound was something to treat, to pervert. Norman Westberg's guitars issued dissonant walls of violently chaotic frenzy. Harry Crosby's basses, distorted beyond recognition, gained a new-found resonance all their own as they began to sound like pianos being clanged upon in the lowest register. Roll Mosimann's drums (along with those of departed drummer Jonathan Kane) made sometimes absurd attempts at mutating chaos into rhythm. Gira was in top form with his vocal persona, like a poetry-crazed incredible Hulk.

Gira himself is almost a kind of Jekyll-and-Hyde character; what his stage persona has in common with his offstage one is a 'philosophy.' Perhaps Gira felt that this part of him was too often misinterpreted with *Filth*; but two things have happened in the way of performance that have rendered it impossible to misconstrue his ideas:

(1) From the home-grown Ecstatic Peace Records comes *Hard Rock*, the poetry cassette between Gira and Lydia Lunch. Both have recorded a prose poem, of about fifteen minutes in length, in Gira's bedroom, during what sounds like a house party. Lunch's "Wet Me on a Dead Night" is an erotic tale of sex-noir and subsequent violence, but the sexuality expressed is flatly conventional in contrast to "I'm an Infant, I Worship Him" by Gira. With hindsight from Cop, Gira's character in this work is very indicative. The character doesn't have a name. He's dirty in every way imaginable. He weighs 349 pounds. He lives to be belittled by his boss, appropriately named Mr. Smother. He jerks himself off and then doesn't wipe up the semen. And so the years pass until the emphasis shifts sharply. He discovers a wino asleep in a play yard. Now something significant occurs: a group of kids begins to taunt and piss on the wino, who's set deep beneath a bundle of shapeless clothes. This strikes Gira's character strongly; he sees in this action an undisciplined form of punishment—"and that's not how it ought to be..." Now Gira riffs through the poetry, superseding the narrator and exclaiming that punishment needs purpose; that directed discipline keeps people in their place. He formulates an anti-Nietzschean stance that submission clarifies, and not obscures, self-identity. The wino "becomes" Mr. Smother, and Gira's character destroys him violently in the name of this sanctified submission. This same didactic purpose drives Cop light years above *Filth* lyrically. There is also an EP, apparently, entitled *Raping a Slave*. Gira is very probably capable of depicting himself as both rapist and slave. The entire story of "I'm an Infant, I Worship Him" is like something right out of the *Polysexuality* collection edited by Semiotext(e). There also seems to be an air of affinity to Katka, if that means anything.

(2) Somewhere along the line after the recording of *Filth*, The Swans performance style altered, mutated. The final element to be subverted by the group has been rhythm. With Cop, rhythm has been slashed mercilessly in half. Now the pace of a song is crawling and numbing. One finds oneself clutching to every pounding beat. Every clanging, crashing inflection or single-chord riff or pronounced syllable is like a bursting bubble of air to a drowning man. To listen to Cop at top volume is to become its willing slave, its raped slave. Sensory attack comes from everywhere; for example the list of track titles on Side Two reads off like a proclamation: "Your Property," "Cop," "Butcher," "Domination is always the absolute theme." Perhaps "top volume" should be clarified. One needs a particular kind of audio set-up to appreciate Cop fully. Do you recall the rock band Disaster Area, from *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*? The set-up they had, in which the audience covered in concrete bunkers miles away from the speakers? Creep up to those speakers and slip on Cop. Then, do not move. Gira himself has shifted his emphasis. Though the incredible-Hulk persona is still maliciously present, Gira adopts a new lyrical tack (attack). Several of the songs on Cop are more formative essays than lyrics, and the vocal is tempered

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appropriately. Sometimes the beast voice emerges through slow, controlled metamorphosis, as on "Cop" and "Why Hide." This beast persona resembles The incredible Hulk in vocal delivery: heavy-throated, primal, monosyllabic. That Gira would keep this persona in reserve is added evidence of his control as a performer.

These songs in the new vein deserve to be studied and contrasted against a highly significant prose piece printed on the album's inner sleeve. Given what has already been discussed about Michael Gira's ideas, it shall only take the reprinting of some lyrics to illustrate their consistency:

"Half Life:" "Permission is bloodless
Ambition is senseless
Don't make a wrong move
Work with a purpose
You win or you lose
Imitate a slave."
"Thug:" "The only real thing is misery
Submission means you get murdered
You get revenge when you wait for it
Frustrated means you're insane...
Sex turns impotence into decay
Unconscious repression degrades the real thing."

Now, a selection from that prose piece...
"...I'm suspended by ropes in front of a mirror. I'm naked. My genitals have been cut away. The word 'craw' has been carved in my chest. I hate my body. I don't want to look at it. When I try to turn my head away I can't; the tendons in my neck have been cut. When I try to close my eyes I can't; my eyelids have been either forced open or removed. I hate my mind, and I hate my body. I'm trapped staring at my carcass. The sound of my breathing is torture. I try to stop breathing. I can't. I can't escape myself."
Gira explained to *Unsound* magazine (#5) that he would like the music of The Swans "to be visceral." It can be readily observed that he has no trouble achieving this.
"The basic approach is exacerbating and aggravating pain," says Gira. "Not causing it, but working on that non-defined pain inside ourselves and our audience. The only basis we use to judge the music is whether or not it's extreme enough." This sheds a new perspective on The Swans' work that audiences are perhaps unaware of: this is the angle of performance as ritual; as exorcism. The liberation from pain through pain. Perhaps Gira's stance isn't so anti-Nietzschean after all.

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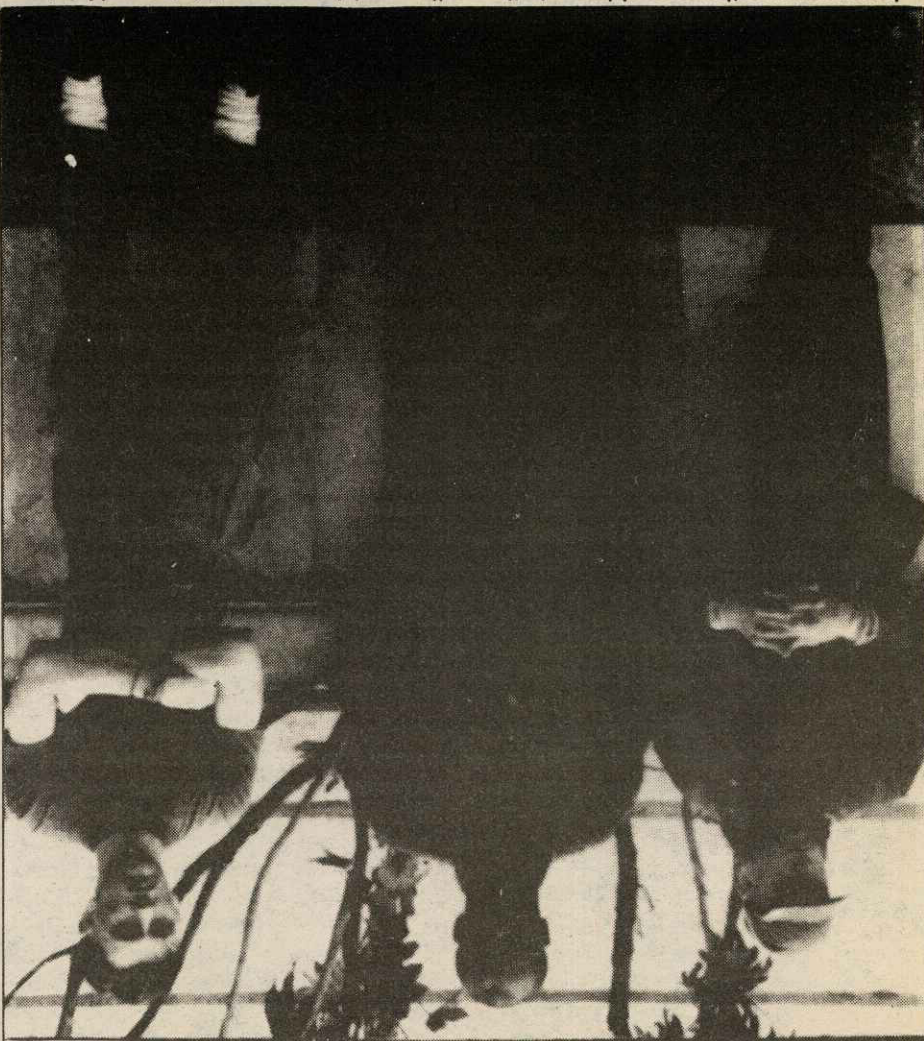
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400 BLOWS



In some ways, the resemblance to the earlier work has grown fainter and yet in others what has been issued of late has been a quite natural and intelligent elaboration of their original working notions. The music of 400 Blows has become freer, yet tighter, and despite changes in the lineup the original spirit is still there. This may be creditable to the group's leader, Andrew Beer, who with Tony Thorpe and Robert Taylor has been committing himself to the same ideas that went into the band's conception.

But the question arises, given what their singles for Illuminated Records have sounded like, how the hell could they maintain themselves through an entire LP? Wouldn't a whole album that sounded like the "Pressure" single be a bit gratuitous, make that monotonous, make that empty?

The disc is called *If I Killed Her I'd Have to Kill Her First*, and the cover is a queer kind of mixture of photos of a major metropolis, an odd collection following a path from an official-looking building to a tall and imposing statue, to a fluttering flag of Canada, and finally to a dingy old fence of corrugated iron. And as always, 400 Blows has its photos of dogs—for after all, this group has told us that this is the year of the dog... we hear this phrase, along with a barking dog on the track that closes Side A, "Introduction."

So what is this album? Not an electronic dance disc, thank God. Instead, they've created a surprising and truly creative pastiche—music with enough character to make the two dance tracks, remixes of their second single "Declaration of Intent" (which tears down the original song much in the way that 23 Skidoo tore down their "Coupe" single to make "Fuck You Go!" on *Urban Gamelan*) and their latest, "Groove Jumping," seem the least inspired pieces on the album. Which is not to say that those two cuts lack in inspiration, or in simple 'spunk'... now *there's* a horrid word...

But in the way of 'spunk,' the group comes out of nowhere, midway through the first side, with "Them That Hills," which isn't dance floor stuff at all, but an acoustic, cowboy-type romp, complete with twangy guitar and "eeehah's" from the band. Really odd. Next is the piece "Love," which is a strange name considering the piece—kind of improvised "noise."

This also describes "Lapwing Chant," with its synthesized birdcalls barely above the level of audibility. Whether these cuts represent a side of the groups music that has simply never been issued before, or whether this is just the group's idea of what to put on an album as opposed to a single, or whether this consideration is even important at all, I can't say. However, these pieces and others in the 'pure sound' vein on *If I Killed Her...* (the official abbreviation) show that they've approached them with the same intensity of energy and ingenuity as they have with their dance numbers.

Ingenuity is a word that comes into play especially as you listen to the second side of the record. It opens with "Conscience," the first song to be credited to Robert Taylor. This is a firm, smooth piece with some compelling bass and drum lines, and a vocoder-fuzzed vocal. The lyric is a kind of self-confidence poem, typified by the closing lines "...in the land where Conscience dwells/it might make all the difference/if we come out of our shell." Very soothing, very assuring. Misleadingly minor as far as songs go, but as the next track begins you may well find yourself wanting to crawl back into that shell of serene security—and only then do you realize how well "Conscience" was programmed on the disc; how it leaves its mark upon the whole of the second side.

The track that follows is called "For Jackie M.," a real Durutti Column-type title, except that there's no peaceful Vini Reilly music to be found here. This is a fragment of a 1981 or 1982 interview between newscaster Tom Snyder and convicted murderer Charles Manson. Now, 400 Blows has always had a keen eye (ear?) for tapes, as in the series "Perspective" 1-3; but here, the segment they've excerpted is priceless. I must see this entire interview. What they have here, over some bare strands of music, is the sound of Snyder (the hills are alive with...) becoming ever

more frustrated and defensive at Manson's easygoing wit, his intelligence, his ability to speak well, and his quick and pervasive use of metaphor. It is clear that Snyder was just unprepared for the simple, eloquent brilliance of this man. Is that romanticizing a killer? I don't think so. Certainly one Mr. P-Orridge wouldn't think so. Manson speaks clearly, concisely, freely, and without double-talk (much) on the subject of his troubled, horrified life. He speaks of the need to be toughened by pain, and how civilized society has abused him and stripped him of his dignity since childhood—"I'm ten years old in your world," he says. It's riveting to listen to.

This is followed by "Men of the Divine Wind (The Kamikaze)," a meeting of voices, gamelan, and synthesizer that—if it didn't resemble the Hideous Mr. Malcolm McLaren's "Obata" (from *Duck Rock*) a bit too closely—could have been a theme piece for an Akira Kurosawa film. Certainly the title fits.

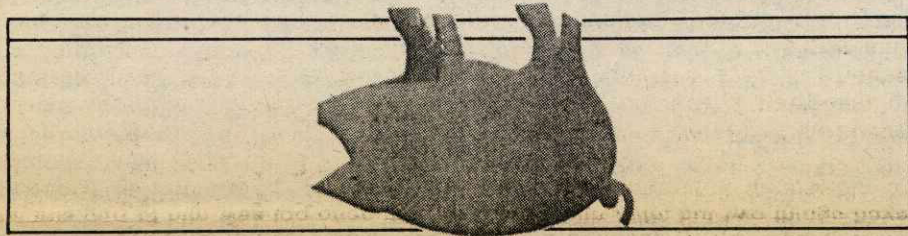
The record closes with "Perspective 3." The "Perspective" series has been an inventive one of short diso-enders, witty bits that attempt to cap innovatively the mood of their records. And with this record, it's really been a wild kind of trip to get here. This one, and God only knows where they find these things, is a diseased little travelogue about the West Indies, the narrator with the real, BBC-type voice (you know, "the Queen's English") talking ebulliently about those quaint, colorful people who just go to the marketplace all day and dance their worries away.

In all of these respects, 400 Blows reveal the world in just the right way, a way that takes the ordinary and makes it ridiculous—and they do this with something like no editorializing on their own part, other than merely selecting the tapes that they want to use. 400 Blows has turned out quite a record here, and it is really gratifying that they didn't just go all out "From the closet to the dance floor," as they put it in the inner groove of the twelve-inch "Groove Jumping" single—the B side of which, incidentally, is a very interesting piece from 1982 called "Strangeways (Revisited)." What's interesting about it now, besides the attractiveness of the music, is being able to observe with hindsight how the band got by with fewer high-tech technology instruments, and without a 24-track studio. The result is something in the manner of "399 to Go," which appeared on a *Touch* cassette in 1983. This is more like the way in which I remember them to have sounded a couple of years ago, when they did pieces for compilations and sampler collections. By rereleasing it now, the group shown that it is still confident about its older work, and doesn't find it an embarrassment (which it isn't). In contrast, Cabaret Voltaire—and probably SPK as well—in interviews are constantly apologizing for their early sound. Why they should be like that is conjectural.

When the "Pressure" single first came out, I figured that it was time for 400 Blows to attempt an LP. Well, within three weeks Illuminated had sent me a copy of its latest release schedule, complete with news of *If I Killed Her...* Wouldn't you call that a curious bit of telepathy?

—CH

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JOHN ZORN

A/a: Oh yeah, anytime you look at one of those women's magazines, there're all these circles and bars and triangles thrown in just to fill the space. I read something that I was turned on by, that one of the things you feel strongly about is cartoon music.

JZ: You like cartoon music?

A/a: Oh, that's something I could go on about for a couple of minutes.

JZ: Well, you definitely should go on about that. I've got a bunch of tapes here... put some of that shit on... I've been into this kind of music for a long, long time. What can you say? This is great American music. Scott Bradley [who composed for] Tom and Jerry.

A/a: I was thinking about how the composers in the 'thirties and 'forties utilized jazz elements. Carl Stalling always said that he didn't know jazz.

JZ: Well you can tell.

A/a: He keeps getting into this music from the 'twenties and the 'thirties, all the time. Sometimes he repackages things a bit too often; he hackneyes himself.

JZ: I don't think so. I think it just became a series of elements that he was using, and that was part of his style—to reuse the same elements and put them in different contexts. I find that really interesting. That was definitely his style.

A/a: One of the things I noticed about Bradley, from the 'forties and into the 'fifties, and perhaps for budgetary reasons, was that his music became more sparse in a lot of places, and especially with the Tex Avery series, which was very well done.

JZ: And very economical, too. Tex Avery was not one of those big names who had a lot of money to put into the projects. You can tell the difference in quality, as great as all the music is. Stalling had the most money to deal with, and his sound quality is just absolutely superb. And then you would say that Tom and Jerry would be next down the line, and Tex Avery below that.

A/a: I always thought that Tom and Jerry's were a bit too heavy-handed.

JZ: The good thing about Tom and Jerry is that there's really very little dialogue, if any, so it's like a little concerto that Bradley is doing.

A/a: He turned in this one score, there was this one where Jerry goes to Manhattan, whatever it's called. He gets tired of the country life and leaves Tom a note and goes to the city with these fantastic background matters of NYC, and the music is swelling. That was like the one time he could get as overblown as he wanted to and get away with it. But normally not, really.

JZ: No.

A/a: But it really shows that some of the cartoon companies, as far as the music goes, had really no inspiration at all.

JZ: Not anymore; that's for sure. The 'forties was the prime period.

A/a: Even so, there was some real crap. Who was it?—Paul Terry.

JZ: Oh yeah, Terrytoons, well, that's the dead zone. But you're getting into the 'fifties. The 'forties was the prime period, and Warner Brothers did a little bit in the 'fifties, but it just slowly died out. And the music for today's cartoons is just total trash.

A/a: I was reading in a book that was very sharp and critical about Universal, that in the 'forties, Darrell Cauller was supposed to have been very good, and very able to use modern and also classical elements, and then in the 'fifties, the criticism of them was that it became music for kiddie-toons, which happens, which is like really bad.

JZ: Well, there are two ways of going downhill, and that's one way; the other is legitimizing it with, like, REAL classical music; and you can just throw all that into the trash can. The film stock and everything, as far as I'm concerned.

A/a: The composer for all of F-Troop, William Lava...

JZ: Lava, yeah. Didn't he do The Flintstones?

A/a: I don't think so. But I'm somewhat familiar with his idiom, and of course you get that all over Road Runner in the 'sixties, though they were just looping everything by then.

[As if mirroring the train of thought, Zorn's cassette of Bradley music plays a speed-slowdown on the soundtrack.]

A/a: Actually, he was really right on with F-Troop; he really turned it into a cartoon.

JZ: I don't remember that. I'll have to check it out.

A/a: Something that I'm less familiar with is European cartoons.

JZ: The only things I've seen are the ones they've made movies out of, and there the music is, you know, pseudo-real soundtrack. It's not cartoon music at all, and really loses in the translation.

A/a: Then there's the Japanese...

JZ: Japanese animation is fantastic, and so are the soundtracks. I've got some records of soundtracks, but...

A/a: I don't like it when they dub series and package them for American television. You know, they can't animate people for a goddamn, but their effects with lasers boggie the mind.

JZ: Really great.

A/a: You said that people don't quite know whether to take your music seriously or not.

JZ: That's true, although in New York it's beginning to be taken a little bit more seriously, just because for some strange reason the critics have changed their mind and decided that it's okay. God knows why. It's a fashion. In Europe it's becoming fashionable too, this kind of thing; they call it "noise," or "New York Noise."

A/a: I've never heard that one. But noise is totally different. But with yours, there are some things that come in, like certain twists on The Classic Guide to Strategy that, even if you're used to it, will shake you up.

JZ: I try. But I realize that you can't surprise everybody, and you can't continue to surprise all the time. There are other things that you can deal with, other than surprise, in the way that you put things together. Even when someone knows a certain sound is coming, when it comes they're still excited or glad to hear it.

A/a: Well, how much of what you do would you say is for effect value?

JZ: Very little if any. I mean, it's not really a matter of effects. And I'm not exactly trying to surprise the audience as much as I am trying to surprise myself, so perhaps if I'm surprised, then the audience will be.

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will be.

—John Zorn



from what I'm involved with. Just to get some people together and tell them "START PLAYING," that's different would flip the coins and then work his pieces out so that they would be chance. But specific way. If you want something to be chance, then for example John Cage really a matter of chance. Chance is something you have to work at to do in a very good ways and bad ways, and everyone has their own particular style, but it's not really not like that at all. Improvisation is a discipline; you learn how to do it. There when they hear my music; they think of improvisation as using chance, and it's

JZ: Yeah, right. Well, I don't want to get into that, but to get back to the question you asked me, I think Cage has had an influence on me but in an oblique kind of way. His whole philosophical thing, which most people seem to be talking about, is something that actually leaves me cold. I'm more interested in his music. I think that the music he made in the 'forties and 'fifties, and into the 'sixties is really great, in the search for a different kind of sound—that kind of aesthetic and feeling. That affected me. His actual scores, when you get down to the graphics, and overlaying clear sheets on top of other sheets—I am not so interested in that at all. And in many ways it was the performance of work like that, and Christian Wolff, that sparked me to get more into improvisation, because I'd be sitting there reading these scores, when you put Cage on the program, and you'd be PLAYING the fucking shit.

A/a: I might be naive about it, but I never felt that Cage was such a formalist, you know, he's just doing what he's doing; he's not trying to be a radical, he's just being himself, by now.

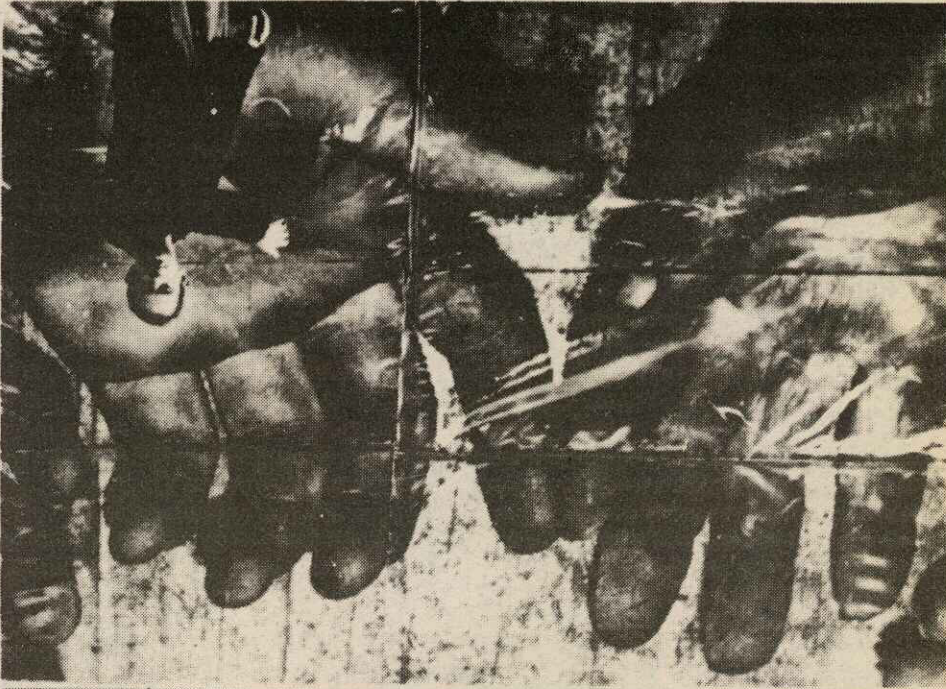
JZ: He may be just being himself, but he definitely has a lot of political overtones to what he's doing, just in the nature of what it is, and I think that what he got involved with was a completely radical step in music. He made a lot of changes in people's heads, and for a long time it was like, all you have to do is go out there and jump around on one leg and bounce a ball, and you're being Cage-ian. It's music. Which in many ways is very good, but it also created a lot of problems.

A/a: You mentioned once with Locus Solus, which I want to go into, that one of the things you were doing was trying to break away from the rock format, from what you can fill in a three-minute song. Getting away from the contrivance and image-crap. JZ: You mean the marketing of rock bands as a product? Yeah, what Locus Solus was really for me mostly was getting involved and becoming friends with a lot of people on the downtown rock scene, and responding to the music—not to the marketing image, which is admittedly part of the scene. Not responding to the social implications, which are also very much part of that scene; even more so than the music, with a lot of those bands. The music is bullshit, but when you look at the way that it's being marketed, with the image they have on the stage, and their involvement in this whole cultural milieu, you get into that kind of shit, later for that for me. I just don't want to deal with that. So I was just thinking about the music, and what I can do in this kind of a genre that I'll still be happy with.

A/a: Well, one of the things about the packaging of Locus Solus, which I've heard that you paid for... JZ: Are you kidding? Every one of those records I've paid for—through the nose! Locus Solus cost me eight thousand dollars to put out. Where the hell did I get it? That's what I want to know... slowly, a little bit at a time, and it added up to eight bills! Jeze! But it's the way I wanted it. A/a: The package is very ideogrammatic. JZ: It's a lot slicker than my other records, which I suppose is part of the form. But I

Watch for Part Two in the Next A/a

SMERSH



It's hard to miss the hallmarks of SMERSH music: Rhythms degraded by Roland distorted somehow, and underlying it all a subtle suspicion of clandestine wit. Such is SMERSH, which is Chris Shepherd and Mike Mangino. Once a week, these two get together in their little basement hideaway and become a rare voice of "rationality" in the mostly-barren plain of New Jersey (a state which, for its size, harbors relatively few apparent talents.)

In the assembly-line of their home-cranked tapes (and in their work on various international compilations) are emotions ranging all the way from angry shrieks — "XXX Going on L" or "Greasin' Wheezer" — to bullshit ditties like "Music For Brian," which is hummed from *The Patty Duke Show*. They've even done a cover version of Kraftwerk's "Trans-Europe Express," naturally the original can only pale by comparison.

One may never know exactly what SMERSH is going to come up with from track to track, but that's okay, because the group probably doesn't know either. But these veteran home-tapers (four long years, and other group-names before that) certainly know how to keep a body hopping.

It is perfectly appropriate to squeeze yourself into SMERSH's mailbox by the sea, at 337 William Street/Piscataway, NJ 08854. Mention A/a and ask for Wally Jumbland's sister. You'll find out.

Q: You have at least ten cassettes out now, along with material on compilations. How long have you been working as SMERSH?

A: We've been working together, as SMERSH, for four years. Before that we called ourselves "The Giant Robots." Before that "The Jungle Moon Men," before that "The Flip C 3," and before that "Neon Noodle." Before that "The Mammals," before that "Barbara Peters and the Poparts," and before that "Pinknoise," who started making tapes in 1977, which started the whole thing.

Q: Did either of you do musical work prior to all that?

A: No.

Q: What do you feel are some of the advantages/disadvantages to working out of New Jersey? How have out-of-state listeners chiefly become aware of you?

A: The biggest advantage to recording in New Jersey is that we live here. The disadvantage is having very little market for what we do. Then again, we do little communication within the state. Out-of-state listeners become familiar with us mainly through swapping tapes and through the various compilations we are on.

Q: It's been said that you have a method of cassette mixing and syncing that bears great interest. What is this method?

A: This is news to us. It certainly is no big deal. We use two regular stereo cassette decks and a four-channel mixer. We record on one deck, then put that copy in the other deck, which is then put through the mixer, and then we overdub. This is in fact very limiting in that we cannot remix anything. This can drive you crazy because the mix is everything. In fact we spend most of the time we record just finding the right mix. Very little time is actually spent performing.

Q: As cassette artists, what attitudes do you have about cassette and record technology?

A: Making cassettes is easy; making records isn't.

Q: Could you ever see releasing records?

A: Yes; send us money! Seriously, we do have plans for a record, but it has to wait until we can save the money, which at this rate is probably never.

Q: Do you, or do you intend to, perform publicly?

A: No.

Q: How did you come to be contacted by *Adventures in Reality*?

A: We answered a classified ad in the *British Paper Sounds*.

Q: Your instrumentation seems to be growing. What do you use?

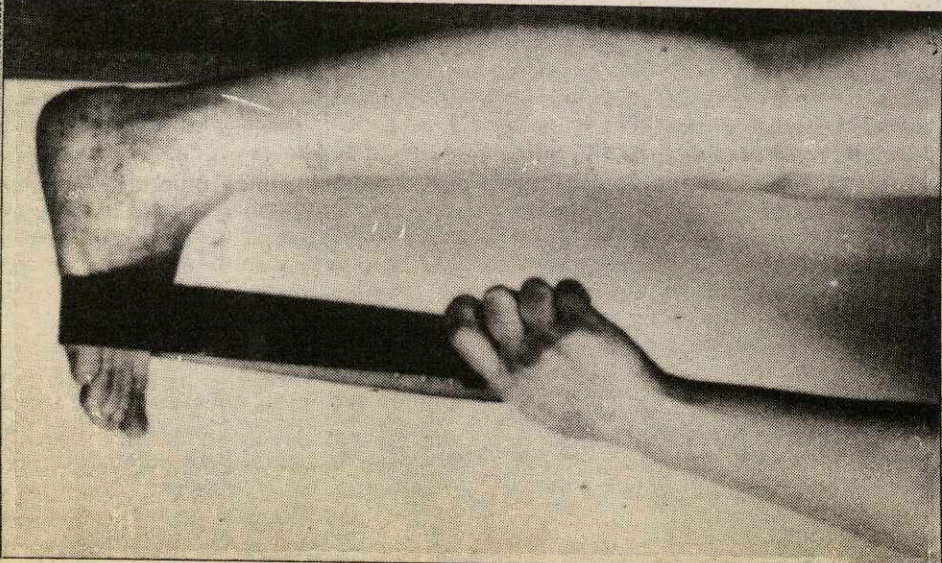
A: We use:

- Roland SH-09 keyboard
- Roland MC-202 Microcomposer
- Roland TR-608 Drum machine
- Roland TB-303 Bass machine
- [Non-Roland] Synare 3 Syntrum
- Electro-Harmonics synth (their cheapest)

SMERSH Tapeography

- SC002 — Dub Chemist Kill 'im
- SC003 — Caracas
- SC004 — This is What You Missed (features SC001, SC002, and works from 1978)
- SC005 — Gash
- SC006 — Noise Ding Dong
- SC007 — Hothouse Bodies in a Cool Culture
- SC008 — Name unavailable
- SC009 — Name unavailable
- SC010 — Make Way for the Rumbler

What sort of man reads...



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Design Art/SMERSH

Q: In recording, what would you say is the ratio of rehearsed to improvised? On plus the usual array of cheap, over-the-counter effects boxes plastic flute, a large bottle, and a Fundimention Sound Gizmo.

A: About ten percent rehearsed, ninety percent improvised. Rarely do we bring in outside people; the band just used to be larger than it is now. We've only brought in one person who wasn't a member of the band.

Q: How do you feel that the past couple of years have evolved your style?

A: We've finally gotten to the point where we can actually bear listening to our own stuff.

Q: What sort of reactions do you get to your work?

A: Written criticisms have been more than favorable, but when played for people in person, it is usually indifference, or "What is that?"

Q: How large would you say your audience is now?

A: It's very hard to say. If you go by direct sales it is very small (we're too embarrassed to say just how small). But considering the various collections that we've been on, it must be growing.

Q: On the new tape *Make Way for the Rumbler*, all of Side B is devoted to one long piece. What is it called, how long did it take to do?

A: What piece? That side is blank! Seriously, it has no title. We just recorded it so that the side wouldn't be blank. It's all live, one-take. We were surprised at how well it turned out, considering.

Q: How do you feel about (or how would you feel about) doing soundtracks?

A: We would love to. Any available?

Q: Can you see any major changes in your future work?

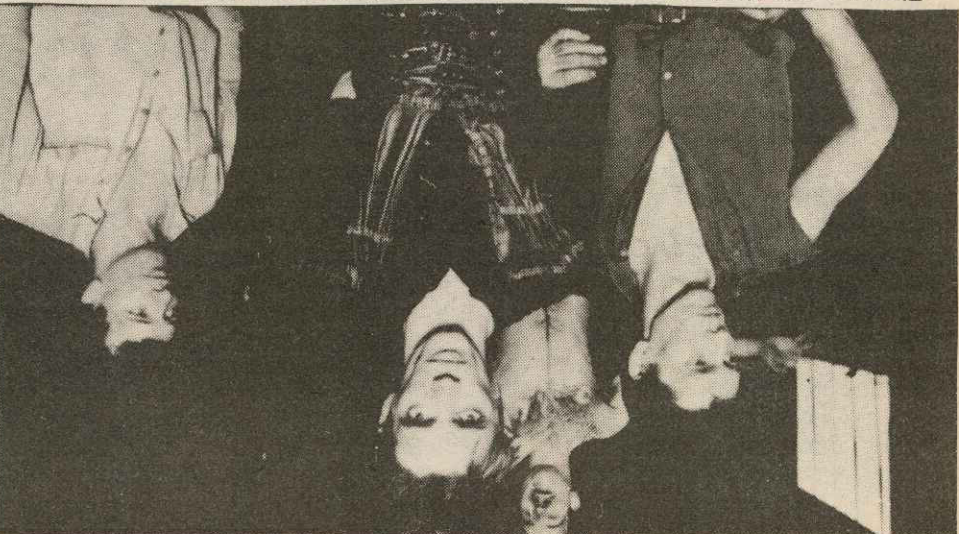
A: Who knows what may happen. When we change it is mainly because of new equipment.

—Questions/Commentary: Carl Howard

An electric guitar we bought for fifteen dollars at a flea market
An old trumpet [Chris] brother used to molest in high school
A real shitty Bontempi toy organ
A bass an ex-member left behind (thanks Bobi)
Woolco electric guitar (the best)
Lawn chairs, snack trays, turntables, tapes (no loops), a cooler, blender,
Plus the usual array of cheap, over-the-counter effects boxes

EINSTURZENDE

NEUBAUTEN



Einstürzende Neubauten roared through clubs in the United States sometime last winter or spring, not all that far ahead of Die Toten Hosen and Test Department. It must have been a whirlwind tour, but the whirlwind probably wasn't powerful enough, or virulent enough, for most buildings were still left standing. The only remaining traces of their presence are a huge color portrait of Blixa Bargeld in the lobby of New York's Irving Plaza, and a hot new cassette of live performances from ROIR. Given the choice of either reviewing the portrait or the cassette, perhaps it's best to do the tape.

All of the live performances contained on the cassette come from Europe, and most of those from their own native country. In general, the recordings date from 1982 and 1983, with one exception.

What is peculiar about this release is that ROIR, with its listening antennae tuned—as usual—only to Manhattan, would commemorate Einstürzende Neubauten's appearance in NYC with a tape of *European* performances. Even the included essay by Kurt Loder leads one to expect to hear the New York show:

"The Neubauten were little more than a rumor in this country until February 1984, when they ventured out of Berlin to play their maiden gigs at New York's adventurous [eh?] Danceteria where, within minutes of wading into their set—a sweat-soaked assault on such heavily miked 'instruments' as jackhammers, hubcaps, giant steel springs, and a fresh-from-the-construction-site cement mixer, along with droning bass and determinedly primitive guitar—they managed to clear out half the packed house and to completely captivate those who remained... For my money, those Danceteria shows were the most astonishing musico-theatrical experiences of the year..."

First it need not even be mentioned how this essay only reinforces the myth that America has no music of its own to offer; that Americans are either weaklings who cling helplessly to every European pop messiah who makes a noise, or philistines who can't divine 'the true way' (as in the audience-half which cleared out of 'the packed house').

What is undeniably true however is that music-establishment venues in New York City—such as Danceteria, The Ritz, and Peppermint Lounge—favor European sounds to American ones in the majority of cases. Two episodes may be offered about Danceteria, as comparative evidence:

November 1983: Psychic TV plays two solid-out gigs to roilingly enthusiastic crowds. The sound is loud, raucous, vibrant, and—importantly—well-interpreted by the audience. PTV leaves in triumphs for other American dates (the recording of the second New York show is now available in LP form).

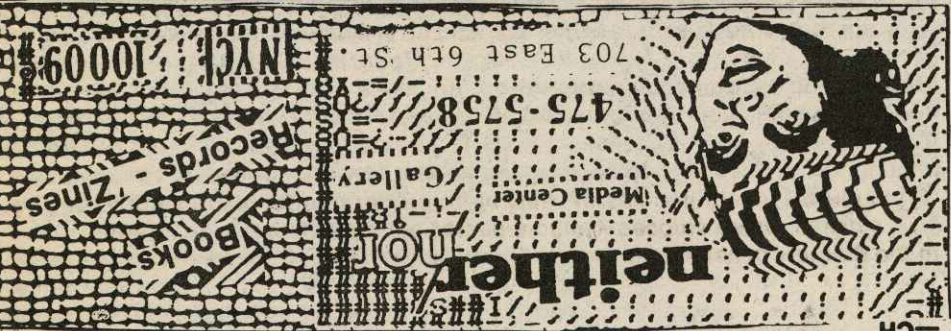
November 1984: The American duo Hunting Lodge plays to an almost begudgingly appreciative audience of no more than fifty people. Their attempts at producing a heavy atmosphere are ruined by several cat-calls and by a hopelessly-misunderstanding sound engineer, who destroys their soundtrack and keeps volume levels far too low. Only two people in the house have ever heard of them. The band is harassed by Danceteria coolies, when they try to leave, about equipment they didn't steal. Dejected but resolute, Hunting Lodge drives off in a cold drizzle at 4 a.m. in their rented pickup trained for Boston.

Make of this what you will, but another (and perhaps the only other) thing that these two bands have in common is: One month after leaving Danceteria, half of their memberships split (John Balance and Peter Christopherson left for Coil, and Richard Skott left for Los Angeles—which is not the same thing at all). Hunting Lodge's finally-available second LP, *Nomad Souls*, will be discussed in an

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S/M Operations proudly announces the release of the second album by HUNTING LODGE, which is entitled *NOMAD SOULS*. This LP includes the hits God Loves the Rock Stars, Beautiful Wolf Hour, and a vocal version of the legendary was designed to accompany *NOMAD SOULS* is also available. The mail order cost of these items is as follows: *NOMAD SOULS* LP—\$8.00. Booklet—\$2.00. Prices include shipping in U.S. and Canada. Other countries please add \$3.00 for airmail. A current list of S/M O. mail order products is available by sending SASL or IRC. Wholesale inquiries welcome.



This is not to begrudge Einstürzende Neubauten an American success, which they fully deserve. Their widely misunderstood stance and sound have nevertheless made them a force of international importance, and this is for a reason. It is not simply that they assault the established guard with clichéd methods, or that their attacks lack focus—there is a purpose to their vehemence.

Somewhere in Einstürzende Neubauten is a dogged perseverance against not only the products of industry, but against man's immunity. Blixa Bargeld and comrades (there's a loaded term) FM Einheit, NU Urn, Mark Chung, Alexander V. Borsig, and (on the *Drawings of Patient O.T.P.*) the British sound man Jon Caffery are quizzical investigators, probing the permanence of reality and myth by hammering on them both until they crack open. Thus it is that the New Buildings Collapse (the rough translation of EN), and that their symbol of the stick-figure man should have a bulseye mark right in the middle of his forehead. The assault on the senses is as real as it is inevitable: someone has to do this.

Right from the beginning, when EN and Deadly Doris were first building each other up on Zickzack Records, there was a curiosity about the structures that produce man's urban sound and image tracks (a public bridge, water, electric drills). In California, Blixa Bargeld drilled a block of concrete which was laid across the stomach of Boyd Rice. Reports of that 1984 show indicated that viewers couldn't see the 'point' of such an action. The point is on the drill bit; the point is at the edge of your nose.

Physical investigation does more than simply shock the media, or expose them—it exposes our own structural defects. The new buildings collapse because they lack the architectural mastery and fortitude of the old; likewise, many human institutions dating back centuries have "collapsed" in the new man, the twentieth-century man. If a structure's foundation is weak, it must be blasted away in order to make room for a new one. Einstürzende Neubauten says, man's foundation is weak; it needs to be blasted away.

That's an interpretation. In Blixa Bargeld's interviews can be found others. He mentioned an American interviewer in 1983 that "the idea of music needs to be destroyed... For example, the idea of music is the idea of oppression, of pressure... it's another idealistic and moralistic way to keep things as they are." According to this interpretation, part of the idea behind EN is the explosion not of myths necessarily, but of falsehoods. Falsehoods in the media and in community, in particular.

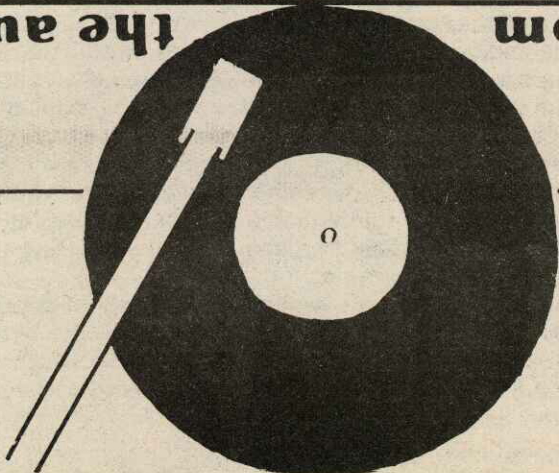
The ROIR tape admirably presents the development of Einstürzende Neubauten's sound in a tight, well-recorded, eight-track capsule. The tape is in fact called 2x4, which refers to its track distribution and is therefore as practical a title as any. From the early track "Womb," recorded in Hamburg in 1980, to "Sensucht (Nie Mehr)" which dates from a 1983 Berlin show, one can note EN's shift in sonic emphasis from pure and physical noises (the bridge, water, and drill) to the more traditionally 'musical,' in which electric guitar and identifiable rhythmic structures play a more important role. For contrast, two versions of "Sensucht" are offered, the other being a 1982 performance subtitled "(Still) Stehend." The musical shift also seems to point up a change in attitude: EN now seems more like dominators than the dominated. Kurt Loder is arguably right about this much: "...none of Neubauten's records have managed to capture its overwhelming, into-the-abyss live sound." The writer then of course concludes with a completely immodest sales pitch for the cassette ("2x4 should definitely whet a few appetites...") that even goes so far as to end with one of the most overused and embarrassing music-review tags of them all: "For those who feel they've heard it all, Einstürzende Neubauten offers irrefutable proof to the contrary."

So even if the essay is ridiculous, it is true that the cassette presents what the records don't—the live dimension. ROIR deserves credit for this much anyway. But perhaps by releasing instead a recording of EN in New York, they would have been able to document the holes between the noises as well.

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CLASSICAL RECORDINGS

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BEETHOVEN —The Complete Symphonies



Beethoven Complete Symphonies Angel Digital (3-Album Reissue of Boxed Set) RLC 3205, 3206, 3207. Kurt Sanderling, Philharmonia Orchestra & Chorus. Sheila Armstrong—Soprano, Linda Finney—Mezzosoprano, Robert Tear—Tenor, John Tomlinson—Bass

Angel Records has just rereleased Kurt Sanderling's thought-provoking set of the nine Beethoven Symphonies in three separate volumes; the complete boxed set was issued a few years ago. The performances are not brand new, but the set was not widely reviewed at the time of its original release, for some reason; and I think the set deserves more acclaim than it received.

There are Beethoven Symphonies sets enough to satisfy anyone's personal interpretive tastes, from Arturo Toscanini's frenetic, rhythmic drive and whiplash-precision to the massive, often lumbering and startlingly slow renderings of Otto Klemperer. One can also observe the sleek, catlike grace of Herbert von Karajan, or the clinically analytical George Szell.

There are out-of-print Beethoven cycles, versions available only as expensive imports, and cycles in progress; as well as those scheduled to be recorded. The indefatigable von Karajan has just recorded his fourth version, in digital sound, of course! The record market seems to be drowning in Beethoven Symphonies. One is tempted to exclaim "ENOUGH!"

Sanderling's performances, however, are special. This German maestro, born in East Prussia in 1912, is not one of the glamorous and flashy podium-playboys before the public, and he has not conducted extensively in the United States until recently. However he has gradually built himself a reputation as one of the most respected conductors of our day. When he made his belated New York Philharmonic debut last season, he had never before appeared in New York, which is truly puzzling.

Perhaps his relative obscurity until this time can be explained by the fact that he has spent much of his career behind the Iron Curtain, having escaped Nazi rule as a young man by fleeing to the Soviet Union, where he was for many years associated with the Leningrad Philharmonic, which was generally considered the finest orchestra in the Soviet Union. He was also music director of East Germany's legendary Dresden State Orchestra during the 1960's and, until recently, he led East Berlin's Symphony Orchestra.

Many recording enthusiasts and reviewers cherish his numerous recordings; I myself had not been familiar with Sanderling's work before, but these Beethoven recordings have convinced me that this is a conductor of rare integrity and considerable stature.

It would be difficult to pinpoint exactly those characteristics which make these readings so fresh and insightful; there are no eccentricities about them. And yet, nothing is routine or impersonal. These are sober, straightforward performances Symphonies (and twice with the same orchestra); although I am told were actually adapted by the elder conductor's excessively slow tempo, which I am told were actually caused by the venerable maestro's physical infirmities. Sanderling does not smooth out Beethoven's rugged, athletic music into gooey, homogenized sonic pabulum, as have some conductors, who shall here remain nameless. Textures are wonderfully clear, although details are never rushed upon at the expense of overall

dramatic thrust. The Philharmonia Orchestra plays superbly throughout, with a warm but not glossy sound that lends humanity to the overall ruggedness of Sanderling's approach. Some listeners may find these performances lacking in lightness and humor where these characteristics are clearly called for, as in, for instance, the First, Second, Fourth, and Eighth Symphonies; however I have not found them to be overly heavy-handed. One is reminded in the first two Symphonies of the young Beethoven himself—an awkward, ungainly, pock-marked young genius trying to make a name for himself in sophisticated Vienna, still not free of his background in provincial Bonn. But no one can complain about Sanderling's *Eroica*, Fifth, and Ninth; I do not know of any more powerful and impressive readings, be they on vinyl, tape, or laser-beam. The Pastoral Symphony is full of personal warmth, and the Seventh Symphony is given a most interesting treatment, one less hectic than usual. Angel's digital sound is as clear and straightforward, and as free from gimmickry, as are the performances themselves. This is a remarkably consistent and satisfying cycle of Beethoven Symphonies, one that disapproves the notion that integral sets of these works are doomed to be uneven in achievement.

—Robert Berger

BALAKIREV Symphony #1 / LIADOV Polonaise

Balakirev Symphony Number 1 in C major, Liadov Polonaise in Memory of Pushkin. Neema Jarvi, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. DS-38090

I could be mistaken, but as far as I can tell not a single work by Milly Balakirev (1837-1910) has been played in New York, or for that matter anywhere else in the United States, within all my years of listening to music. Yet this Russian master was enormously influential in the development of eighteenth-century Russian music. Although largely self-taught, he was the mentor of such better-known figures as Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Borodin. And he wrote some very effective music, including the C Major Symphony recorded here. This is therefore a most welcome release; an exciting performance of an exciting but unfamiliar work. Curiously, all of the recordings of the Symphony of which I am aware have been EMI/Angel issues, including performances by Sir Thomas Beecham, Herbert von Karajan, and Yevgeny Svetlanov—the last of these being a Russian Melodiya version released through EMI. None of these performances remain available. Now Angel has issued a performance by the Estonian-born conductor Neeme Jarvi, who has been rapidly establishing a name for himself as one of the most important conductors before the public today.

Balakirev's First Symphony (there is a second) was written over an unbelievably long period, some forty years! Fortunately, it proves itself worth the time and effort. It is stated in the usual four movements, the scherzo coming second. Authentic Russian folk melodies alternate freely with vaguely oriental-sounding tunes, as with Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin (Balakirev, like many Russians, was of Tartar origin, and a painting of him in his late years reveals the features of someone who could have come straight from the Asiatic Steppe). I do not know however if he ever used actual Tatar melodies, which do tend to be Pentatonic. The Symphony sticks fairly close to traditional principles of symphonic construction without slavishly following them; this has bothered some writers, critics, and musicologists who insist that a symphony must fit a truly rigid mold to be "truly symphonic" and "soundly constructed." Yet the Balakirev First, like many Russian symphonies, makes perfectly good structural sense on its own terms. I have always felt that any work stands or falls on its melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic inventiveness, and not on whether it conforms to some arbitrary, preconceived, and academic formula.

The Birmingham Orchestra, though not as well known as London's five orchestras, sounds every bit their equal here. Jarvi has somehow managed to make them even sound like a Russian orchestra; the Birmingham players throw customary British reserve to the winds. It appears that London is not the only place in England in which one can hear world-class orchestral playing. As a bonus, the same forces give us the slight but nonetheless attractive Festival Polonaise of the Russian miniaturist Anatoly Liadov, whose brief orchestral music has been heard occasionally over New York's WQXR and WNCN.

Incidentally, this minor master's inability or unwillingness to work hard may have indirectly contributed to the rise of Stravinsky as a composer! He was commissioned to score the *Firebird* ballet, but procrastinated until the young Stravinsky was given the task. The digital sound of this recording is first-rate—clear and colorful. One who expresses an interest in this disc, who is certainly justified in doing so, could conceivably end up wondering the music of Balakirev has been all his life.

—Robert Berger